
Vocational Education: a social anarchist perspective

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ABSTRACT This article discusses the social anarchist tradition of educational thought and practice, in order to throw new light on the philosophical discussion of the liberal-vocational distinction. Focusing on the central anarchist idea of integral education, I argue that the political stance of social anarchism is inseparable from the educational ideas and practice of this tradition, and contrast the key aspects of this political perspective with those embodied in mainstream educational policy and theory in the liberal state. Examining the issue of vocational education and training in light of this often-neglected political position can, I suggest, contribute to our understanding of the relationship between educational practice and values, political ideas and social change.

In recent years, many philosophers of education have questioned the apparent dichotomy between liberal and vocational education. Notably, Richard Pring has argued for a broadening and reformulating of the liberal ideal so as to embrace the idea of vocational relevance, along with 'practical intelligence, personal development [and] social and community relevance' (Pring, 1995, p. 195). Similarly, Christopher Winch has developed a detailed and rich conception of vocational education, embracing concerns about 'moral and spiritual well-being' alongside notions of economic and political goods (Winch, 2000).[1] Pring's motivation for this reconceptualisation seems to be primarily the recent attacks that the traditional liberal view has come under – notably the claim that it excludes many people from the 'liberal conversation' – and the threat to liberal educational values from those who, in response to such attacks, reduce educational goals to the language of 'efficiency' or to narrow economic ends. In contrast, Winch's chief motivation seems to be a sense that the issue of vocational education has not been given the serious philosophical treatment it deserves – presumably partly because of the dominance of the traditional liberal conception.

In what follows, I shall discuss a tradition of theorising about vocational education which is rarely included in such debates – namely, the social anarchist tradition. Social anarchist literature and educational experiments, dating from the end of the nineteenth century, offer a wealth of philosophical insights into the liberal-vocational distinction and the relationship between education and social change, from a perspective which is distinct from both the Marxist and the liberal one, and, as such, can enrich our thinking about these issues.

Social Anarchism and Integral Education

Anarchism is often dismissed as holding an unrealistically ‘utopian’ or ‘naive’ view of human nature. Yet, as several scholars have shown (see, for example, Ritter, 1980 and Morland, 1997), the nineteenth-century social anarchists, who arguably provided the bulk of the theoretical foundations of the tradition (crystallised by thinkers such as Bakunin, Kropotkin and Proudhon), in fact acknowledged human nature to be twofold, involving both an essentially egotistical potential and a sociable, or altruistic, potential. As Bakunin picturesquely expressed this idea:

Man has two opposed instincts; egoism and sociability. He is both more ferocious in his egoism than the most ferocious beasts and more sociable than the bees and ants. (Bakunin, in Maximoff, 1953, p. 136)

In effect, the social anarchists subscribed to what Alan Ritter (1980) refers to as a contextualist view of human nature. An appreciation of this point is crucial to understanding the role and nature of education in anarchist thought. For an important aspect of the transition to a stateless society, for the anarchists, is the nurturing of those moral qualities deemed necessary to create and sustain such a society. Thus, the emphasis in anarchist educational programmes was not so much on attempting to bring about a preconceived alternative model of social organisation, but on laying the ground for the natural evolution of such a model by means of fostering the attitudes that underpin it, alongside the experiment of creating a microcosm of alternative modes of social interaction without the state. A consideration of the anarchist point of view, then, suggests that the question of the role of vocational training within the school curriculum, like other educational questions, can only be understood within a broad political context.

A central feature of anarchist educational thought is the notion of integral education – i.e. an education that combined intellectual and manual training. This idea characterised all early anarchist schools, notably the Escuela Moderna in Barcelona (1901-1907) and Paul Robin’s educational experiments in France (see Smith, 1983, pp. 18-61), where visits to factories, technical training and agricultural work were incorporated into the school curriculum alongside traditional academic subjects. Thus, at Paul Robin’s school for orphans, Cempuis, intellectual education was seen:

as essentially complementary to manual and physical training. Questions, problems, needs, arose out of the day-to-day practice of the workshops, but not in a mechanical, over-programmed way [...] If manual training was carried out in the right way, the child would want to know more of the principles behind it. (Smith, 1983, p. 34)

The chief theoretical exponent of this idea was Kropotkin, who developed the ideal of a society in which, instead of the current 'pernicious distinction' between 'brain work' and 'manual work', reflecting divisions between a 'labouring' and an 'educated' class, all girls and boys, 'without distinction of birth', should receive a 'complete education' (Kropotkin, 1974). Kropotkin's views were guided by the belief in social equality as a valuable and attainable goal, and the ideal of a society based on mutual cooperation and fraternity.

Kropotkin's analysis of capitalist, industrialised states and their inherent inequalities convinced him that it is the capitalist system itself which divorces manual work from mental work and thus creates the false dichotomy between the two and the associated inequalities in social status. The only way to break down these divisions was to provide an education in which, in the words of Proudhon, 'the industrial worker, the man of action and the intellectual will all be rolled into one' (Edwards, 1969, p. 80).

The notion of integral education involves more than just a breaking down, at the practical level, of the traditional liberal-vocational distinctions; it does not propose, that is, merely to ensure that all children leave school with a useful trade and appropriate theoretical knowledge, so that they may become fully participating members in the productive economy.

Similarly to the theoretical defence of polytechnical education systems established in the Soviet Union immediately after the Revolution, and in Communist China, one of the main reasons for believing in the value of an education which involved real encounters with the world of work was that distancing children from this world in an academic environment would cut them off from the experience which lay at the basis of social and political consciousness. Both Marx and Mao explicitly defended the view that 'combining work with study would keep the young in touch with those moral and political truths which were part of the consciousness of the working class' (Smith, 1983, p. 52). Although Kropotkin was less focused on the struggle of the working class, and emphasised instead the needs of a complex industrial society and the value of cooperative social organisation, this theme can nevertheless be found in much anarchist writing on the content of the school curriculum. Indeed, Kropotkin's theory was informed by the assumption, shared by Marxist theory, that labour – as a central aspect of human life and an element in personal well-being – is to be distinguished from work – which, in capitalist society, becomes merely a commodity, to be sold for a wage.

The anarchists' aversion to hierarchical, centralistic structures, which forms the basis for their bitter dispute with Marxism, is reflected in their educational position. Because Marxists focus on the class dimension as basic to all notions of social struggle and resistance, they see the necessity of educating

a proletarian revolutionary vanguard and are traditionally concerned with the education of workers. The role of education from a Marxist perspective is, above all, to bring class political consciousness to the worker; a role which, according to Lenin, could only be played from the outside, by an enlightened educator (see Bantock, 1984, p. 242). In contrast, the social anarchists refused to see the revolutionary struggle to change society as a linear progression, in which there is a single point of reference – the means of production – and a single struggle. Where in Marxism there is, as Todd May puts it, ‘a single enemy: capitalism’ (May, 1994, p. 26), so that class is regarded as the chief unit of social struggle, anarchist thinking involves a far more tactical, multidimensional understanding of what the social revolution consists of. In anarchism, as Colin Ward says, ‘there is no final struggle, only a series of partisan struggles on a variety of fronts’ (Ward, 1996, p. 26).

Anarchist education, therefore, is less about creating a vanguard for the social revolution, and more about establishing alternative patterns of living which would eventually undermine the hierarchical structures of the state.

The early social anarchist thinkers were only too aware of the realities of growing industrialisation, and of the fact that they were educating workers. They held, with Proudhon, that ‘the work a man did was something to be proud of, it was what gave interest, value and dignity to his life’ (Smith, 1983, p. 25). Thus:

An education that was divorced from the world of work, that is, an education that was entirely bookish or grammar-schoolish in conception, was valueless from the point of view of ordinary working-class children. Of course, an education that went too far in the other direction, which brought up children merely to be fodder for factories, was equally unacceptable. What was required was an education which would equip a child for the work-place but would also give him a degree of independence in the labour market. (p. 25)

Furthermore, the anarchist concept of integral education, apart from reflecting the anarchist social ideal, also involved an important notion of personal well-being. The social anarchist challenge to the typical division of labour in society would, it was hoped, help to avoid the sense of monotony involved in working in one occupation throughout life. This was regarded as reflecting what the anarchists called the ‘fundamental organizational principle of diversification’ (Smith, 1983, p. 19), which itself was seen as a consequence of the basic human need for diversity.

But, crucially, anarchist educational programmes also involved a commitment to political and moral education, in the sense of challenging the dominant values of the capitalist system – for example, the wage system, the competitive market place, the control of the means of production, and so on – as well as fostering social virtues.

Chief amongst the social virtues which social anarchists regarded as essential to the flourishing of the stateless, equitable society which they

envisioned, was that of fraternity. Geoffrey Fidler, on the basis of research into the work of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century French anarchist-libertarian educators, has argued for a conceptual connection between fraternity and the anarchist idea of integral education. He states, 'At the heart of libertarian as "complete" education lay the urge to realize an equal, voluntary and "right" espousal of the mutual arrangements of the fraternal community' (1989, p. 46). What Fidler suggests is that the anarchists' critique of capitalist society hinged primarily on their objection to the socio-economic inequalities created by the division of labour in such a society. In positing an ideal society, therefore, they regarded it as crucial that no such division should obtain, both out of a commitment to social equality, and a notion of individual well-being as conceptually and psychologically connected to the well-being of the community. Yet such a society could not be created or maintained without promoting and nurturing the human propensity (already present, but often suppressed by capitalist institutions and values) for benevolence, mutual aid and fraternity.

Fidler talks of anarchist education as being, at heart, an endeavour to 'awaken the social instinct' (1989, p. 37). The moral qualities involved in the attitude of fraternity were promoted largely through what we would refer to as 'school climate' – in other words, through the fact that the school itself was run as a microcosm of a social anarchist community in the making, alongside the moral example of teachers who were expected to exhibit what Kropotkin regarded as the ultimate moral principle of anarchism, namely, 'treating others as one wishes to be treated oneself' (Fidler, 1989, p. 37).

Fidler argues that this anarchist perspective makes a distinctive contribution to the world of libertarian education in that the notion of integral education was regarded, above all, in an essentially moral light, as 'a means of achieving the conscious or ethical form of fraternity' (Fidler, 1989, p. 35). The social anarchists involved in such educational experiments, according to Fidler, 'enunciate a practical utopianism by affirming their commitment to apparently unrealistic moral principles as a vehicle for the realistic purposes of persuasion, education and guidance in present conduct' (p. 35).

Thus, while challenging the existing system and trying to minimise its damaging effects on future workers, social anarchist educators never lost sight of the radical new reality which they wanted to create – and which, they believed, was fully within the scope of human capabilities and aspirations.

It is interesting to note how the social anarchist position differs not only from the orthodox Marxist, but also from the traditional liberal one.

The Liberal-Vocational Distinction – Contemporary Perspectives

Richard Pring is rightly critical of the tendency to talk of liberal education as if it were, conceptually, diametrically opposed to vocational education. Yet his chief criticism is the point that this implies that

the vocational, properly taught, cannot itself be liberating – a way into those forms of knowledge through which a person is freed from ignorance, and opened to new imaginings, new possibilities: the craftsman who finds aesthetic delight in the object of his craft, the technician who sees the science behind the artefact, the reflective teacher making theoretical sense of practice. (Pring, 1995, p. 189)

Pring's criticism, in other words, is not an external critique from a socio-political perspective (a perspective which, as the foregoing discussion shows, characterises anarchist thought on education), but comes from within the educational sphere itself. He argues that vocational education, just like the traditional conception of liberal education, can be intrinsically valuable, and connected to a sense of personal well-being, and therefore should not be so rigidly conceptually separated.

The conception of freedom which Pring appeals to here is the very conception which lies at the core of the classic liberal account of education, from Plato onwards, namely the idea of education as liberating in the sense of freeing the mind. This impression is strengthened by the role Pring assigns to the work of Oakeshott in his discussion. In Oakeshott's ideal of education as conversation, freedom is conceived as a freeing of the mind from everyday, concrete concerns: liberal education is an 'invitation to disentangle oneself from the here and now of current happenings and engagements, to detach oneself from the urgencies of the local and the contemporary ...' (Oakeshott, quoted in Pring, 1995, p. 186). As Pring notes, this particular conception of liberal education, in focusing upon the world of ideas, 'ignores the world of practice – the world of industry, of commerce, of earning a living ...' (p. 186). Yet in arguing that, in our reconceptualising of the liberal ideal, it is this 'art of reflection' that we must preserve, Pring, it seems, is still subscribing to a basically liberal notion of what it means to be free.

In anarchist thought, in contrast, the concern with the concrete aspects of social justice, distribution of goods and the material well-being of the community are always at the forefront of educational thought and practice. Freedom is understood as, first and foremost, effective freedom from all forms of oppression. Thus the emphasis, for the anarchists, in breaking down the liberal-vocational distinction, is not on encouraging critical, detached reflection in the sphere of vocational training in order to create more reflective, more intellectually developed craftsmen, but on paving the way for the concrete freedom of the worker from the restrictions of the capitalist state by, amongst other things, abolishing the division into manual and non-manual labourers.

Of course, at the time at which Kropotkin was writing, the social divisions into 'brain-workers' and 'manual workers' of which he speaks were far more apparent and clear-cut than they are today. Early socialist thinkers could not have predicted the socio-economic developments of late capitalism, in which the traditional category of 'workers' is no longer such a clearly demarcated social class. Yet the important point to understand in this context concerns precisely this relationship between educational goals and existing economic and

social reality. For Pring, Winch and many other writers in this field, the structure of the economy, the labour market and the social and political institutions in which such educational debates take place are acknowledged to be subject to critical appraisal by active citizens, but it is not the aspiration to radically reform them which forms the basis for educational philosophy and theory. Of course it is important not to understate the presence, within liberal theory, of a tradition of critical enquiry and reform, and of the idea of citizens as actively shaping society. But as liberal philosophy of education has, over the years, become increasingly concerned with education in the liberal state, the assumption of the liberal state's inevitability as a basic framework sets thinkers in this tradition apart from the radical social anarchists, in spite of their agreement on certain underlying values. Even theorists like Winch and Pring, whose analyses present a radical challenge to the traditional conceptual parameters of liberal education, still operate within these basic assumptions regarding the inevitability of the liberal state.

As argued above, although the aspiration to radically restructure social and political organisation lies at the heart of anarchist thought, the chief concern of anarchist educators is not to directly promote a specific model of the good society, but to create an environment which will foster and encourage the development of the human propensities and virtues necessary to create and sustain new forms of social organisation without the state. Thus the school is seen primarily as a microcosm of one of the many possible forms of anarchist society; an experiment in non-hierarchical, communal forms of human interaction where, alongside a rigorous critique of existing capitalist society, the interpersonal relationships which constitute educational interaction are based on the normative role assigned to the human qualities of benevolence, mutual aid and social cooperation.

Pring and other writers in the liberal tradition note the importance of fostering critical attitudes in pupils, but because of the liberal-state perspective which informs their work, their discussion seems to lack the normative vision which guides anarchist educators. Indeed, whether out of an explicit commitment to autonomy or an endorsement of some version of liberal neutrality, liberal educators are often reluctant to speak in anything other than general terms of providing pupils with the tools needed to make critical judgements and life choices. In arguing, for example, for a breakdown of the distinction between education and training, Pring (1995) makes the point that one and the same activity could be both 'educational' and 'training'. But, again, the political, moral aspect is entirely absent from this discussion. One can, as Pring says, change vocational approaches to education so as to aim to educate 'broadly liberal, critical' people through the activity of training them; but this in itself does not challenge the way we conceptualise society; the basic socio-economic distinctions would still hold, even if one aspires to have educated workers.

All this is not to suggest that theorists like Pring and Winch overlook the political and economic context of educational policy. Indeed, one important

contribution of such critiques of the traditional ideal of liberal education is the claim that it does not fully take into account the importance of addressing, at the level of educational goals, the needs of society and the economy. As Pring puts it, 'there is a political and economic context to education that we need to take seriously' (Pring, 1995, p. 22).

Much of Winch's work has been devoted to developing a detailed account of this point, drawing on the notion of social capital. Starting from the assumption that all education aims at personal development and fulfilment, Winch develops the idea of 'liberal vocationalism', which embraces civic and vocational education, entailing a concept of vocational education which is at once far richer and broader than the instrumentalist conception and also implies a far wider definition of productive labour than the influential one developed by Adam Smith and later by Marx.

In thereby insisting that vocational education should not be conceptually confined to 'preparation for producing commodities, or even necessarily for paid employment' (Winch, 2000, p. 191), but that it involves such aspects as civic responsibility, cognitive skills, social practices and spiritual development, Winch's analysis may, at first glance, seem to be completely in tune with the anarchist aspiration to break down the narrow delineation of vocational, as opposed to academic, education.

However, in social anarchist theory, the political and economic context is defined by a normative set of values, the concrete implications of which demand a radical restructuring of our social arrangements and institutions.

Writers within the liberal tradition commonly refer to the 'liberal traditions of education' (Pring, 1995, p. 9) as opposed to the 'utilitarian ones of training' (p. 9). The point of both Winch's and Pring's analyses is to break down these distinctions so as to provide a broader conception of what it means, within a liberal conception of the good society, to be educated. Yet the conflict to be resolved, for the anarchist, is not that between 'those who see the aim of education to be intellectual excellence (accessible to the few) and those who see its aim to be social utility (and thus accessible to the many)' (Pring, 1995, p. 114) – a conflict which Pring regards as 'the most important and most difficult to resolve' (p. 114) – but that between our vision of what kind of society we want and what kind of society we have. Education, on this view, is an inherently normative process, and, crucially, a form of human interaction and relationship. Yet as such, it is not merely a means for achieving our political ideals, but part of the process for discovering, articulating and constantly experimenting with these ideals, in the course of which those particular human qualities assigned a normative role in our concept of the good society, need to be continually reinforced, articulated and translated into educational practice.

Thus, while most social anarchists would probably agree with Winch that 'it is important to maintain a very broad vision of "preparation for work"' (Winch, 2000, p. 163), they would go further than his conceptual point that 'a society that sees the development of individuals, of economic strength and of

civil institutions as closely connected, would find it natural to attempt to achieve a balance in combining liberal, vocational and civic education' (p. 191). For social anarchists are not concerned merely with insisting that any discussion of education in society must take these issues into account, but are motivated by the belief that there is something radically wrong with current society, and that reconceptualising education, and engaging in specific, normative educational practices, is one way to go about changing it.

It would be misleading to characterise either the traditional liberal view or the kind of liberal vocationalism promoted by Winch as views lacking in aspirations for improvement or for social reform. It does, however, seem true to say that both these views – as evident in the work of the authors cited here – assume that the way forward lies in a broadening and deepening of the democratic aspects of our social institutions, out of a belief that this will both contribute to personal well-being and strengthen the moral fabric of society. The unwritten assumption behind much of this work is that the basic structure of the liberal state is not itself subject to debate. Thus Winch, while clearly committed to democracy and to further democratisation of social institutions, carefully avoids making any normative pronouncements as to the preferred mode of social organisation. He attests to this position early on in the book, defining the brand of liberalism to which he subscribes as 'the contingent and non-foundational kind described by Gray as "agnostic" or "contested"' (Winch, 2000, p. 2).

Likewise, liberal theorists of vocational education cannot be accused of insensitivity to the moral and political aspects of the kind of educational values being promoted. Pring, for example, mentions the moral aspect of the social utility conception. However, he discusses this in the narrow sense of the promotion of virtues (such as enterprise) seen to be essential for helping learners function more positively (i.e. morally) in the world of work and business.

Both Winch and Pring, although rejecting the narrow conception of vocational education as 'preparation for the world of work', still seem to remain pretty much within the tradition that regards 'the world' – however richly theorised – as something which is simply out there, to be prepared for and adapted to by the education system and its graduates, rather than to be created or changed.[2]

In general, although most philosophers in the liberal tradition now acknowledge, with Winch, that 'educational, moral and economic ideals are linked, both conceptually and causally ...' (Winch, 2000, p. 134), the interesting question is which way the causality goes. It is often assumed that education should fit in with economic and political trends, rather than, as has been traditionally argued by radical dissenters, opposing them and standing for something different.

The danger for Pring, for example, is that education may, by clinging to the traditional liberal ideals, become 'disconnected from the social and economic world which it should enlighten' (Pring, 1995, p. 123). This is,

indeed, a welcome criticism and an important reassessment of the traditional liberal ideal. However, it reveals the central contrast between this and the far more radical anarchist vision, which, rather than merely 'enlightening' the social and economic world, seeks to fundamentally change it.

For the social anarchists, 'politics, and for that matter economics, is subservient to morality ...' (Adan, 1992, p. 175). Accordingly, it is the vision of a political order based on the moral foundations of the social virtues that, in turn, gives rise to particular educational ideals and goals. Although one suspects that both Winch and Pring would sympathise with this perspective, it is hard to find explicit support for it within their writings on vocational education.

It is quite possible that in a social anarchist society, where basic needs are met and communal arrangements, ideally, have secured relatively stable economic relations, it may make sense to talk of the kind of 'liberal-vocationalism' that Winch is sympathetic to – an education which, in addition to providing a sound intellectual and moral basis, 'encourage[s] young people to make occupational choices from amongst those that society considers worthwhile' (Winch, 2000, p. 31). However, within the nation-state, where, according to the anarchist critique, inequalities are entrenched and reflected in the division of labour and the market economy, such 'choices' cannot be made freely, for they are dictated by the economic needs of the state.

The above points about the anarchist perspective on education may suggest that the anarchists were unduly concerned with questions about the social good, overlooking the question of personal fulfilment and well-being. Indeed, Richard Pring makes the point that the apparent conflict between liberal education and social utility 'reflects a deeper divide between the pursuit of individual good and the pursuit of social welfare' (Pring, 1995, p. 121). But this again presupposes a particular way of looking at the individual. In anarchist ethics, individual freedom and well-being are created and sustained in the context of social interaction; one cannot consistently talk of the individual good without taking social context into account. On the anarchist view of morality, indeed, the individual and the moral good are conceptually and logically bound (see Adan, 1992, pp. 49-60).

On the policy level of devising specific educational programmes which would help children enter the world of work, Winch's analysis makes several important points, some of which have interesting connections to the anarchist view. For example, in his discussion of the issue of transparency of markets, Winch points out that all vocational education depends to some extent, for it to have been considered a success, on speculation as to the availability of certain jobs in the labour market. But, as he explains, 'at the level of skills acquisition, the labour market is often a futures market, trading in commodities whose value will only become clear at some point in the future [...] One is, in effect, betting that a current investment will be worthwhile in two or three years time' (Winch, 2000, p. 128).

The implicit picture of economic life behind these remarks is of the economic sphere as something that is, as John White puts it, 'reflected by' rather than 'created by' education (White, 1997, p. 78).

Likewise, although Winch is in agreement with elements of the anarchist critique in stating that young people are 'potentially at the mercy of a market which may not have a particular call for their skills and knowledge at a stage in life when, by definition, and according to well-established accounts of how markets work, they are in a poor position to make rational decisions on the labour and training market' (Winch, 2000, p. 130), his solution to this problem is to find ways of linking demand and supply of labour so that vocational education can successfully provide students with jobs in the market. He does not see these problems as inherent features of market capitalism that can only be remedied by radical political and social change.

Winch argues convincingly that:

For vocational education, it is important to maintain a very broad vision of 'preparation for work' which not only encompasses the different forms of paid employment, but also domestic and voluntary labour. It also follows, from the reluctance that I have argued one should have towards unduly elevating the value of some occupations and denigrating others according to personal taste and preference, that a society that wishes to continue to develop various currents not just of skill, but of value and outlook on life, needs to take a generous attitude to the provision of vocational education, so as to allow for the proper development of a wide variety of occupations. (Winch, 2000, p. 163)

But the denigration and preferences which Winch refers to may in fact be, as the anarchist would argue, largely a result of the inherent structural features of our society. If this is the case then, again, only a radical reconceptualisation of our social institutions could adequately address these issues.

Accordingly, while anarchist educational projects run within the reality of the state sought to embody, in their structure and day-to-day management, the principles and practice of communal living, their long-term programmes for vocational education also embodied the hope that the 'outside world' for which they were preparing their children would be – largely as a result of this moral groundwork – a very different one from that of the present.

We have seen, then, how the anarchist conception of integral education breaks down the traditional distinctions between the liberal and the vocational ideal not just from a conceptual point of view, nor from the point of view of creating a broader educational goal for modern liberal states, but as part of the radical challenge to the existing political order.

An Anarchist Curriculum?

When working within the dominant constraints of life within the state, the task for the anarchist educator is to lay the grounds for the transition to anarchist,

self-governing, equitable communities. One can begin this process, as argued by Kropotkin, Ward and others, on the smallest possible scale, by challenging dominant values and encouraging the human propensity for mutual aid, cooperation and self-governance. Indeed, the anarchist revolution is conceptualised by most of the social anarchists not as a violent dismantling of the present system in order to replace it with a radically new one, nor, as in the case of Marxism, a remoulding of human traits and attitudes, but as a process of creating a new society from the seeds of aspirations and tendencies already present in human action. As Kropotkin emphasises, the foundations of anarchist society are, above all, moral, and thus the emphasis of the educational process must be on fostering those moral attitudes that can further and sustain a viable anarchist society. Of course, part of this process involves adopting a critical attitude towards current institutional and political practices and arrangements, with an emphasis on the manifestations of oppression and social injustice. But this critical stance has to be encouraged in a climate which itself reflects the values of solidarity and equality.

Another essential ingredient in this educational process is the absence of fixed blueprints for future organisation; in other words, although pupils should be encouraged to reflect on broad social and political issues, and to question current institutional arrangements, they must not, on the anarchist view, be manipulated into advocating a specific form of social organisation, but must be encouraged to see themselves, first and foremost, as potential social innovators and creators. Of course, the question of whether anarchist educational projects in fact succeeded in avoiding such manipulation is open to debate. The crucial point of such educational endeavours, nevertheless, is to encourage pupils to grasp the central anarchist idea that society and political life are malleable and potentially subject to constant improvement.

The utopian aspect of anarchism is already implied by these comments, and I want to suggest that, whether or not one regards the creation of a stateless society as a feasible, or even a politically worthwhile goal, there is something educationally and morally valuable in the attempt to encourage students to actively and creatively reflect on possibilities for new forms of social organisation that may reflect values such as equality, social justice and fraternity. Utopian thinking, in this sense, can have an important motivational force in educational endeavours, releasing creative thought, prodding us to examine our preconceptions and encouraging speculation on alternative ways of conceptualising and doing things which we often take for granted. It thus, as Barbara Goodwin has argued, 'offers a specific programme and immediate hope for improvement and thereby discourages quiescence or fatalism' (in Goodwin & Taylor, 1982, p. 26). One way in which such utopian thinking can be reflected in the curriculum is by means of political education, that, as the above discussion suggests, has an important role to play in any comprehensive conception of vocational education.

The anarchist educational stance involves postulating an ideal reality in which the class-structured division of labour – seen as a result of the modern

capitalist state – simply does not exist; arguing that such an alternative social reality *could* exist, and constructing an account of the types of human propensities needed to support such a reality. Education then needs to focus on fostering such propensities, and on providing both liberal and vocational training so as to prepare children to be the creators of such a social reality. Yet this approach on its own may seem naive and, clearly, has to be supplemented by some form of political education, so that students understand the critique of existing society, and have the analytic tools necessary to articulate new social and political norms.

The liberal educational perspective, in focusing on the notion of autonomy in the context of the liberal state, often leads to demands for greater democratisation of the workplace, the school and other social institutions. The anarchist perspective, in contrast, involves not only the ‘leap of faith’ that a stateless, non-hierarchical society is possible and can be sustained on the basis of already present human propensities – but also, crucially for education, the utopian hope that the very imaginative exercise of encouraging people to conceptualise the exact form of this society, and to constantly engage with and experiment with its principles and manifestations, is itself a central part of the struggle for social change.

Although there is no systematic treatment of such a programme for political education in the historical accounts of anarchist educational experiments, nor in the theoretical works on education by leading anarchist theorists, political education, in some form or another, clearly permeates all aspects of anarchist education. Whether in the course of visiting factories at the Escuela Moderna, or of planting their own vegetable garden and managing the produce at the Stelton School (see Avrich, 1980), pupils were encouraged to develop a critical awareness of the problems and complexities of the existing state system and to speculate on alternative modes of socio-economic organisation. It is interesting, though, to consider a more specific attempt to translate the utopian, imaginative element of anarchist thought into concrete pedagogical practice. An example of such an attempt is offered by a small pamphlet published by an independent anarchist publishing house, entitled *Design Your Own Utopia* (Bufe & Neutopia, 2002).

The programme suggested in this pamphlet offers a model for a classroom discussion in the context of political education, based around a question-posing pattern, by which each question answered (by the group, or individually) leads, by way of a consideration of various options and implications, to further questions. Posing and answering the questions along the way demands a rigorous and honest treatment of normative commitments and values, in a thought experiment whereby one is forced to confront the possible practical implications of one’s values.

The pattern is to start, not from the current institutions of the liberal state, but from an open-ended discussion in the course of which values are articulated and principles considered, alongside a critical examination of the implications of and justification for the principles under discussion. Of course,

such an approach requires a certain degree of sophistication and would probably be more suited to older children who have already got some grasp of basic social and political concepts. It could, however, be creatively incorporated into a political education programme involving familiarisation with political concepts, alongside imaginative, utopian thought.

The programme starts with the question of scope: students are asked, as a first step, to consider whether their utopia would be a global utopia, or, if not, 'a nation-state? A bioregion? A city? An eco-village or other type of international community?' (Bufe & Neutopia, 2002, p. 3). The programme goes on to ask 'What would be the fundamental values of your utopia?' and, interestingly, 'Would individuals choose their own goals and values or would their goals and values be those of your utopian ideology?' – a question which paves the way for a discussion of the liberal ideal, the ideas of community and individual freedom, and other connected issues.

Further on in the course of the exercise, students are presented with questions about the specific content of their utopia, and encouraged to think through their implications. For example, 'What would the rights and duties of members of the utopia be?', 'Would the number of children per parent be limited?', 'What would your decision-making process be?', 'How would production and distribution be organised?' and 'Would the roles of men and women vary?' (pp. 4-5).

Such questions open up the discussion to accommodate general theoretical ideas and encourage students to speculate on the feasibility of political organisations other than the state, and their relationship to each other, in a far broader and more imaginative manner than that usually achieved in political education or citizenship courses.

The recent Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) recommendations on citizenship education in schools, for example, centre on the notions of developing the knowledge, understanding and skills needed for 'the development of pupils into active citizens' (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 1998, p. 20). Although it is hard to find fault with this idea as a general educational aim, the perspective from which it is formulated is clearly one of understanding and reinforcing the current political system, rather than radically questioning it. This is not to suggest that the programme is narrowly focused on the state – for it specifically recommends 'an awareness of world affairs and global issues' (p. 22) alongside an 'understanding of democratic practices and institutions' (p. 22). However, the playful element of utopian thought experiments proposed here could, I suggest, enrich this process of 'understanding' and 'developing skills and knowledge'. In the anarchist utopian experiment, students are asked to speculate on the feasibility of political organisations other than the state and their relationship to each other, not as an informative exercise, but as an imaginative one. Of course, the QCA report, as well as several writers on citizenship education (see for example Fogelman, 1991), emphasise the need for an active, participatory role on the part of future citizens, and attach considerable importance to 'student empowerment' (Lynch

& Smalley, 1991, p. 171). However, utopian thought experiments add a valuable dimension to the idea of empowering students through experiments in active democracy in that simply considering the types of questions proposed here can 'help us to understand that the present social, political and economic systems are human inventions, and that we, collectively, have the power to change them' (Bufe & Neutopia, 2002, p. 1).

I believe that such an educational approach not only constitutes an attractive, stimulating alternative to conventional teaching of political and moral issues but, as many writers on utopia have noted, encourages creative and critical thinking about social and political reality. A political education programme along these lines would clearly have to be thought out in further detail, and with a great deal of caution. As mentioned, the social anarchists themselves failed to provide any such systematic account. However, I believe this kind of approach encapsulates an important aspect of the anarchist educational stance, and is valuable in its own right even within a state education system.

Likewise, it goes without saying that government policies on vocational education and skills training, far from encouraging the idea of children as potential creators of a new social reality, explicitly endorse the view that education is about fitting in to the existing system (see for example Department for Education and Skills, 2003). Social justice, in the context of these documents, is, unsurprisingly, reduced to the notion of 'full employment'. And achieving a 'fairer, more inclusive society' is seen to be a matter of 'narrowing the gap between the skills-rich and the skills-poor'. This is assumed to be simply a matter of ensuring greater parity of skills across the market, not of any underlying moral commitment or sensitivities to social virtues.

In conclusion, the anarchist idea of integral education may, on the surface, seem very much like notions such as Winch's 'liberal vocationalism', which both challenges the common liberal-vocational distinction and broadens our understanding of productive work and its connection to individual well-being. However, I have argued that what makes the anarchist perspective distinct from the liberal one is firstly its radical political vision – a vision which hinges on a faith in the possibility of a society organised in stateless, self-governing, equitable communities – and, connectedly, the understanding that while the precise form of such communities is indeterminate, the moral values which underpin them have both descriptive and normative validity, and need to be reinforced by an educational process.

This analysis illustrates how the political dimension of anarchist thought is reflected at all levels of the educational process – not in terms of imposing a blueprint or training a revolutionary vanguard, but in terms of raising awareness of the radical possibilities for political change and the vision of a society radically different from our own – in which we are not merely concerned to educate workers, but to believe that the distinctions between workers and non-workers will disappear.

Approaching educational ideas from a vision of what the ideal society would look like, and making questions about how feasible this vision is, why it is desirable, how different it is from our present one, and what the transition would involve, part of the educational-philosophical debate itself, puts this debate in a very different light. At the very least, it may help us to rearticulate and rethink some of the very values – such as freedom, critical thinking and justice – which lie at the core of liberal thought.

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Notes

- [1] Although other philosophers of education have addressed these issues (for example Williams, 1994 and White, 1997), these two works by Pring and Winch represent the most substantial philosophical treatment of the field of vocational education in recent years.
- [2] A great deal of the literature on the issue of globalisation in educational contexts makes similar assumptions: the economy, we are told, is moving in certain directions, creating certain changes in the labour market, and education must follow suit by preparing children for ‘an uncertain future’, ‘flexible job-skills’, and ‘insecure employment’ (see for example Burbules & Torres, 2000, p. 28).

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